

The Schaulager concept

Schaulager, administered by the Laurenz Foundation, combines the functions of storing, studying and presenting modern and contemporary art. It is based on the innovative idea of storing artworks in such a way that they remain accessible for study purposes when they are not on exhibition.

Normally, art that is not on display is crated up and locked in a vault. In the typical museum situation, 'schauen' and 'lagern' – 'seeing' and 'storing' – are mutually exclusive activities, which are brought together in the name 'Schaulager'. Especially for large installations with extensive space requirements, this new storage concept ensures that the work remains accessible to specialists in the fields of art and art history.



View of a storage space, photo: Tom Bisig, Basel

The Schaulager concept was devised by Maja Oeri for the art collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation. The starting point was the idea that interaction with the original work is essential to the study of art. Storing works openly guarantees their accessibility for viewers, scholars and restorers.

The works in the collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation are regularly exhibited in the Kunstmuseum Basel. When they are not on show, they are kept at Schaulager, where they can still be seen by visitors with a specialist interest in art (researchers, teachers, school groups, museum professionals and artists). However, Schaulager also reaches a wider public by mounting major exhibitions of contemporary art and hosting other events.

Storing art

Schaulager is designed to store art at controlled levels of light, temperature and humidity. Since the works remain visible, restorers can continuously monitor their condition. This makes it possible to detect any material-induced changes at an early stage and to take appropriate action where necessary.

Whereas the ageing processes of traditional media, such as oil paint on canvas or stone sculpture, have been the subject of comprehensive research, new materials and media pose a whole range of unanswered questions. The collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation includes, for example, works made of chocolate, Vaseline, wax, plaster and plastic – materials that raise interesting issues, since their ageing properties are so far largely unknown. The conservation department works in close cooperation with the artists to find new technical solutions for the long-term conservation of all elements of the work.

The secure storage of the artworks at Schaulager is designed to ensure that the works can be viewed and fully appreciated by future generations.

Studying art

Interaction with the original at first hand and the fostering of interest in contemporary art are central concerns of Schaulager. The open and visible storage of the works enables access for study purposes.

The collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation at Schaulager and its exhibition activities are starting points for documentation, publications, academic research and public events. Specialist visitors can study works at first hand and use Schaulager's archive and library. The institution actively contributes to research, via seminars and symposia organised in collaboration with universities and art schools, and through the two professorships established by the Laurenz Foundation in the department of art history at the University of Basel. Schaulager is also cooperating with the Swiss National Science Foundation project 'eikones – Iconic Criticism' and supporting its investigations of the power and meaning of images.

Presenting art

Schaulager is a place of dialogue and exchange. It holds regular exhibitions, accompanied by catalogues, for a wider audience. The exhibitions, often devoted to an individual artist, approach their subject with sensitivity and restraint. They are meticulously prepared, following rigorous standards, by the Schaulager team of researchers and curators.

The exhibition spaces allow for the presentation of large groups of works. In this exceptional setting, the participating artists can take the time they need to prepare and set up site-specific installations with particular space requirements. This close cooperation with the makers of art facilitates the creation of unique projects that also win international acclaim.

The accompanying programme of publications and events offers various possibilities for deepening the viewer's active engagement with the works on show.

Further reading

Schaulager: Preserve, Study, Share

ed. Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager Basel, Basel: Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager, 2012